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Town buys bogs

Vote almost unanimous

BY SUSANNA SHEEHAN CLIPPER STAFF

Last Saturday afternoon, Town Meeting voted 212-12 to buy 267 acres of open space for \$1.98 million, using the Community Preservation Act program. After the vote, residents applauded their efforts to preserve open land in Duxbury.

Article 15 proposed buying 17 parcels of land including cranberry bogs and other land owned by Stanley Merry in various locations around town. In addition, six acres of buildable land is included - one acre in the Cedar Crest area, which is valued at \$140,000 and five acres near the Wright Reservoir, a \$190,000 value.

The purchase equals about 1.6 percent of Duxbury's land area, according to information prepared by the Conservation Commission, which sponsored the article with the Commu-

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Town buys Merry cranberry bogs

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nity Preservation Committee. Five other town boards endorsed this article including the Board of Selectmen, the Finance Committee, the Fiscal Advisory Committee, the Open Space Committee, and the Agricultural Committee.

Community Preservation Act funds will pay for the entire purchase price and no borrowing is needed. The cost of the land was \$1.894 million. The total expenditure voters approved was \$1.98 million, which includes the land price, the cost of other assets, and another \$85,500 in surveyor costs, legal fees, conservation restrictions, and a fee for a farm consultant.

The land was divided into three groupings to distinguish their locations, which are non-contiguous. They are the Cedar Crest group, the North Hill/Waiting Hill group, and the Gifford Bog group.

The Cedar Crest group includes six parcels totaling 100.63 acres. These properties are located on either side of Temple Street, not far from Laurel Street. According to Conservation Administrator Joe Grady, this purchase will triple the amount of open space immediately abutting the town-owned Whiton Woods conservation land and double the amount of walking trails in that area. It will preserve the open, scenic landscape along Temple Street and help protect endangered wildlife. It also includes the Harlow brook and pond.

The North Hill/Waiting Hill group includes eight parcels totaling 63.76 acres. Much of this land abuts the Waiting Hill preserve conservation land off of West Street. It includes a portion of

West brook, five cranberry bogs, and the North Hill dam at the North Hill marsh. The bogs will be allowed to go fallow to help with water quality as they are near the Mayflower I and II drinking water wells.

The Gifford Bog group totals three parcels and 102.99 acres and is located on both sides of Temple Street near Church Street. Grady said this purchase includes the oldest working cranberry bog in Duxbury, dating back to 1855. It protects the 36-acre Wright Reservoir and abuts an existing town-owned future drinking water well site.

Grady called this open space acquisition, “a unique one-time opportunity to protect drinking water, recreational areas...and preserve wildlife and scenic vistas” in Duxbury.

One resident questioned why the town was buying cranberry bogs since they were considered wetlands and, thus, unbuildable. “Is this land really worth almost \$2 million? What are we protecting it from? The land is not buildable,” said Leslie Lawrence. “The two million is buying 267 acres. It is well worth the price,” Grady said, noting that purchase price was negotiated with Merry after both he and the town obtained independent appraisals for the value of the land.

“The greatest form of protection is ownership,” he added. “Land to build on is becoming more marginal in Duxbury but people are finding ways to develop this land.”

There are already lease agreements with farmers for the Merry cranberry bogs and these will continue for 20 years, said Grady. For the past 40 years, the town has leased its seven existing cranberry bogs to growers. In Article 25, town meeting voters approved new ten year lease agreements for those bogs.

As part of the purchase package for the Merry bogs, the town will also be paying \$7,500, which is half the cost of a new flume for the Wright Reservoir, \$414,000 for “41.4 A-pool Ocean Spray delivery rights,” and \$60,000 for stock for delivered fruit barrels to Ocean Spray. The A-pool rights allow the cranberry growers to sell their barrels of berries to Ocean Spray for \$50 each instead of \$20, which a non A-pool grower would receive.

Grady said that these costs were assumed by the town “to make it worthwhile” for a grower to operate on these bogs. “We felt it was important so growers would invest their capital and renovate the bogs,” said Grady. He said these Ocean Spray rights were a valuable commodity that the town could sell in the future. There is the possibility that the town could see some revenue from the cranberries if the price per barrel increases past a certain point. Grady said that when the price per barrel was at \$80 in the 1980s, the town “made over \$1 million.” Merry is also giving the town two parcels of salt marsh totaling 9.8 acres off Duck Hill Road.

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